

**2010 SBA Small Business Week
New York State Small Business Person of the Year**

*Stella Penizotto
Shining Stars Daycare, Inc.*



Stella Penizotto received an Associate's Degree with Honors from Onondaga Community College in Early Childhood Education in 1990 and her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education in 1992 from SUNY Oswego. Soon after graduation, Stella realized that teaching jobs were scarce and decided to return to her first passion – working with young children. In July of 1994, Stella opened Shining Stars Daycare, Inc. in East Syracuse, NY. The initial center had a capacity of 32 children and employed four people. Over the course of the next 15 years, Shining Stars expanded to three full-time centers with a combined capacity of 363 children and 78 employees.

The road to such remarkable success was not without obstacles and Stella took each in stride, never giving up until Shining Stars achieved the next level of expansion. Over the past 12 years, Stella and her husband John have worked with the Small Business Development Center at Onondaga Community College. Stella first contacted the SBDC for assistance when running out of room at their current location provided an opportunity to expand. In 2001, Stella purchased a 7,000 square-foot facility in Manlius, NY securing an SBA guaranteed loan from CIT Lending. In 2006, Stella and her husband secured another SBA guaranteed loan to help finance construction of a second location in

East Syracuse, NY. Shining Stars moved the original center into the newly constructed building. Stella designs each center keeping in mind the needs of parents, children and staff. They are bright, cheery and inviting with state-of-the-art amenities like heated floors for crawling young children and indoor gymnasiums specifically designed for certain age groups. Stella's philosophy is that children need a place where they can flourish socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually in an environment that encourages creativity and individuality.

In December 2008, Shining Stars added a third location in Liverpool, NY supported by another SBA 504 loan. Despite set-backs each time Stella made the decision to build a new center, she persevered against all obstacles, from environmental issues to grant funding suddenly becoming unavailable, to finish the center. Stella always kept a positive attitude until the project was completed. In that same year, Shining Stars was inducted in to the New York State Small Business Hall of Fame.

The child care industry is notorious for high employee turnover and low wages. Stella recruits and retains superior employees because she is a fair and hard working manager who recognizes her employee's strengths. She offers competitive wages and benefits that include paying 50% of health insurance for employees who work more than 20 hours per week and paid training for the benefit of their individual careers and the quality of care at the centers.

Shining Stars gives back to the local community throughout the year. Children at all three centers raise proceeds for St. Jude's Children's Hospital through a Trike-a-thon and older children raise money for the MDA and American Heart Association via a Hop-a-thon. The staff participates in the Breast Cancer walk every October and May and the centers donate to local fire and police departments, schools and other worthy causes. In 2007, they raised and contributed \$5,688 and \$6,915 in 2008.